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AUTHOR Duffy, Terence
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the issue of peace education in Northern Ireland in its broadest sense. It looks not merely at peace education per se but also at the sectarian context of schooling and at a variety of anti-sectarian initiatives. In recent years there have been several peace education ventures in Northern Ireland reflecting the statutory responsibility of the education and training agencies in the promotion of peace. These efforts have occurred at a variety of levels (none of them mutually exclusive from one another) but the principal venues have been the schools, youth and community agencies, and the higher education and adult education sectors. The schemes pioneered by these diverse organizations have ranged from holiday projects involving groups of Catholic and Protestant children to programs of study on Northern Ireland history and politics to various types of cross-community contact schemes in a variety of institutional and non-institutional settings. A relatively new feature on the scene is the work of the Community Relations Council (CRC) which has programs in the areas of reconciliation and community skills training. The CRC was established in January 1990 as an independent organization (with substantial government funding) and charged with the task of promoting better community relations and the recognition of cultural diversity. In recent years the Department of Education in Northern Ireland has developed the notion of Education for Mutual Understanding as a basic strategy of encouraging appreciation of a divided heritage and community. The possibilities as well as the problems of implementation of many of these ideas are the subject of this paper. (Contains 36 references.) (Author)

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PEACE EDUCATION IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT: THE DIVIDED SOCIETY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

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PEACE EDUCATION IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT: THE DIVIDED SOCIETY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Terence Duffy
University of Ulster
Magee College, Londonderry
Northern Ireland

This paper explores the issue of peace education in Northern Ireland in its broadest sense. Therefore it looks not merely at peace education *per se* but also at the sectarian context of schooling and at a variety of anti-sectarian initiatives. In recent years there have been several peace education ventures in Northern Ireland reflecting the statutory responsibility of the education and training agencies in the promotion of peace. These efforts have occurred at a variety of levels (none of them mutually exclusive from one another) but the principal venues have been the schools, youth and community agencies, and the higher education and adult education sectors. The schemes pioneered by these diverse organisations have ranged from holiday projects involving groups of Catholic and Protestant children, programmes of study on Northern Ireland history and politics to various types of cross-community contact schemes in a variety of institutional and non-institutional settings.

A relatively new feature on the scene is the work of the Community Relations Council (CRC) which has programmes in the areas of reconciliation and community skills training. The CRC was established in January 1990 as an independent organisation (with substantial government funding) and charged with the task of promoting better community relations and the recognition of cultural diversity. In recent years the Department of Education in Northern Ireland have developed the notion of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) as a basic strategy of encouraging appreciation of a divided heritage and community. The possibilities as well as the problems of implementation of many of these ideas are the subject of this brief paper. In terms of organisation, the paper will first address the segregated nature of Northern Ireland society and its schools. This will lead into a treatment of the problems of developing peace education in a divided society and of recent peace initiatives. Consideration is also given to the issues of tolerance and 'contact' in influencing the future of peace education in Northern Ireland.

1 Introduction: Northern Ireland – Segregated Society and Segregated Schools

In Northern Ireland the inter-relationship between political, social and religious life has ensured deeply-rooted links between the schools and education (Murray, 1985). As a direct consequence of this, the majority of schools are denominationally exclusive so that there is little crossing of the Protestant-Catholic divide during the school day (Dunn, 1989). The basic structural underpinning of this segregated school system is the separation between *controlled* schools (attended mainly by Protestants) and *maintained* schools (attended mainly by Catholics). Controlled schools, under the management of local education authorities, are totally funded for capital and recurrent expenditure. In this system while the Board of Governors have to be "publicly representative", the Protestant churches have a statutory membership thus endorsing a strong tie with the Protestant churches. Likewise the maintained schools are managed by the Catholic church but the price-tag they pay for this greater autonomy is a contribution of 15 % of capital expenditure. The evolution of this system lies in the segregated and politically bifurcated nature of Northern Irish society. The schools therefore are a reflection of the major historical cum political divisions in that society.

There has been little evidence (even in recent years) of a "strong will" on "either side" for a radical departure in the structure of schooling in the province. Admittedly, since the outbreak of the current conflict in the late 1960s there has been much discussion of the desirability of "mixed schools". Indeed in the 1970s groups such as All Children Together began to advocate a policy of integrated education. Following on from these demands (and reflecting changes in Northern Irish society) the integrated schools movement has grown so that there are currently twelve integrated schools. In response to these trends the Department of Education has provided in its planning for new legislation which facilitates the development of integrated schools and "places a statutory responsibility on the Department of Education to encourage integrated education".

2 Peace Education in a Divided Society

In the work of peace education in a divided society like Northern Ireland one must be aware that existing curricula represents a selection made from

the broader culture in which they are set. As the way a curriculum is delivered by the providing agencies has as much impact on learners as the written curriculum itself, the praxis of the educator/trainer is critical. Therefore in any review of curriculum in such a divided society the agencies will wish to reflect on the condition of the current practice and explore new approaches that may permit innovation in peace education (Stradling, 1984).

There are a range of curricular approaches that might prove valuable in generating an increased understanding of "peace education" and which might equip educators with the cognitive and affective skills to design, implement and defend peace education in the curricula of a range of constrained settings. Interesting work in this field by the Irish educationalists Paul Rogers and Maura Ward has already appeared in *Peace, Environment and Education*. Of particular note is Rogers' treatment of curriculum development strategies (Rogers, 1991). Certainly teachers working in this field should develop a critical analysis of their educational practice. This will assist them identify and challenge elements of peace education and in constructing a defensible "peace curriculum" against public criticisms and competition from other (perhaps academically better established) subjects. One must also be conscious of the presence of degrees of "indoctrination" in education for peace. Peace educators are often accused of being agents of government – trying to "make people more peaceable". Be that as it may, the key concepts of any peace curricula – peace and democracy, co-operation and justice, tolerance and mutual understanding, identity and equality, have integral and critical import. Such basic values are central to the concerns of peace education in a politically hostile environment.

3 Recent Peace Education Initiatives in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has had a number of peace education initiatives in recent years. The driving forces behind these ventures have been multifarious. Some have been the product of educational innovation within the universities (and put into practice, in pilot form, in schools) such as the Schools Cultural Studies Project of the early 1970s (Robinson, 1981). This was an impressive pre-EMU initiative. Others have followed state directives such as the comprehensive Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) programme implemented by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland as a policy directive from the mid 1980s (Robinson, 1987). The

latter was purposively designed as an all-embracing curriculum innovation which would inject thinking about EMU into every sector of the curriculum. There have also been a number of smaller ventures conducted by individual reconciliation groups or charitable foundations (Kilmurray, 1984). The most ambitious is the Quaker Peace Education Project (QPEP) which has been based at Magee College, University of Ulster, since 1988 and which has specialised in prejudice-reduction work with school-children. QPEP has pioneered key support-materials and teaching packages to assist teachers implement EMU (QPEP Report, 1990). In more recent years the Community Relations Council, the Forum for Community Work Education and the Workers Educational Association have given support for peace education courses which target adult audiences. These organisations have mounted an interesting range of courses for a wide body of professional groups and for the general public. There have also been recent advances in the teaching of human rights education, reflecting (to some extent) a growing dissatisfaction with the administration of justice in the province. In the realities of Northern Ireland this concern has traditionally been most manifest in the nationalist community and is expressed by information groups such as the Committee on the Administration of Justice. However loyalist concern over policing and justice issues is growing, reflected in the campaign group – Justice for All. At the university level the most obvious example of peace education developments in Northern Ireland has been the establishment by the University of Ulster of degree courses in Peace & Conflict Studies at Magee College. The undergraduate course there commenced in 1985 and a Postgraduate Diploma/Masters came on stream in 1987.

Northern Ireland initiatives in this field have not evolved in isolation from peace education in the international setting. Indeed peace education is probably one of the best examples of international education in the province. Curricular ventures such as Education for International Understanding, World Development Education, World Studies, Modern Studies and Creative Response to Conflict have all had an effect on the evolution of curriculum materials for peace education in the north. There has also been an influence from related subjects and cross-curricular developments such as history and religious education. The result has been the evolution of innovative, dynamic curricular materials. Unfortunately many of these efforts have lacked coordination and direction. If one were thinking of a balance sheet for peace education in contemporary Northern Ireland it would be that the notion is now quite well established in a number of

educational sectors of Northern Ireland life. However the effectiveness of these strategies is greatly off-set by diffidence about the direction of particular initiatives and by varying amounts of resistance. Therefore while there are examples of undoubted success in the implementation of notions of peace education, there are also considerable reservations about both content and strategy. While there is little question in such an ethnically divided society as to the propriety of education for peace – the implementation of curricular programmes which carry this thrust does not occur without question.

4 Peace and Tolerance: Elusive Values in a Politically Divided Society

One of the most obvious features of the divided reality of Northern Ireland society is the segregated nature of its school system. This separation of Protestant and Catholic during the formative years of primary and secondary education constitutes an implicit obstacle to mutual understanding and tolerance. The vast majority of Northern Ireland school-children continue to receive their elementary and secondary education at a school which is not "mixed" denominationally (Protestant and Catholic). Moreover EMU and other more *ad hoc* peace education initiatives do not have unequivocal support (Bullick, 1989). Equally significantly, Northern Ireland is a society where "tolerance" might be interpreted by some as ignoring the atrocities of the "other side". It is also one where the concept of "justice" could well be opposed as a subtle tactic in undermining the majority community. Also, of course, Northern Ireland is a place where questions of "equality" cut across historically complex layers of prejudice and discrimination. All of these concerns are intensified when the political barometer rises after a particularly grisly bombing or sectarian killing.

The challenge for peace education is to model its concepts against a superstructure which is at best uncommitted and at worst actively hostile. When one considers that peace educators do that against a background of a political and ethnic situation which is constantly shifting – it is clear that their task is difficult indeed. Moreover we are only gradually coming to a realisation that (aside from all the historical problems which have divided the communities in Northern Ireland) "the troubles" have made their own impact. We must grapple also with the legacy of "hate" which the experience of violence and sectarianism has produced. Brimful of historical

prejudices and "hang-ups" between Protestant and Catholic loyalist and nationalist – the Northern Ireland community have in recent years seen plenty further to hate in one another (Hamilton, 1990).

It is interesting in terms of the perceptions of young people in Northern Ireland that in a survey conducted in 1983 most young people thought it unlikely that Northern Ireland would be peaceful fifty years from now (McWhirter, 1983). There is however a growing realization that it is insufficient merely to advocate peace. There is a necessity for positive peacemaking initiatives. In that connection, a major reason for the strength of attention devoted to young people lies in their ready accessibility via the schools (McCartney, 1985). Moreover there is some evidence which suggests that young people in Northern Ireland are essentially "tolerant" of "the other community". John Greer's 1982 study has shown that of the 2,000 secondary school pupils surveyed the vast majority were "open rather than mistrustful towards the other side" (Greer, 1985). This surprising attitude of tolerance is also suggested by McKernan's 1980 study of pupil values which revealed that most young people wanted "a world at peace where they are free and happy". McKernan felt that this demonstrated the idealism of youth "which should not be ignored by teachers, curriculum developers and all others with an educational responsibility" (McKernan, 1980).

5 Tolerance and "Contact" in Northern Ireland Schools: A Route to Peace Education?

Most efforts to try to cultivate work in the field of tolerance and contact have been built on the notion of the "contact hypothesis" (Cairns, 1987). The basic reasoning is that by providing settings in which Protestant and Catholic children can meet they can begin to acquire values of tolerance and self-recognition and to accept the integrity of cultural and political difference. As Amir puts it, the essence of the contact hypothesis is that:

> "Contact between people – the mere fact of interacting – is likely to change their beliefs and feelings towards each other ... If only one had the opportunity to communicate with the others and to appreciate their way of life – understanding and consequently a reduction in prejudice would follow." (Amir, 1969, p. 319.)

Underlying integrated education and cross-community schemes in Northern Ireland is a belief that the earlier and more sustained the contact that occurs between Protestant and Catholic children the more beneficial it will be in

discouraging negative stereotypes. From this stand-point the integration of the separate school systems appears to be a sensible policy. Unfortunately this movement currently accommodates only a small minority of the province's schoolchildren. Recognising that even the long-term integration of Northern Ireland schools is likely to be a pipe-dream, many organisations have adopted as an alternative strategy intensive programmes of contact, most notably in the use of integrated holidays. This has often included trips to the "neutral" ground of Europe, other parts of the U.K. or even the U.S.A. (McGinley, 1990). Significantly, there have also been a number of criticisms of the whole rationale of the contact hypothesis (Brewer, 1984). A counter-argument to these schemes which emerged at an early stage in their development was that contact proved difficult or impossible to maintain once the holiday had ended. In the ethnically segregated neighbourhoods of cities like Belfast and Londonderry, the children simply reverted back to the sectarian norm. In reality, a definite structure was required to maintain the contact momentum. Responding to these criticisms, holiday organisers will now generally build in and promote follow-up meetings after the holiday has ended. However, and no less seriously, there is also the inherent problem that in the current financial realities such holiday schemes can only cater for a limited number of children.

The contact hypothesis has been evaluated at some length by social scientists in a number of countries, including the USA. These evaluations tend to suggest that contact *per se* does not necessarily reduce intergroup prejudice (Trew, 1989). So with a growing realisation that contact is not a "cure all" for changing prejudices there has been an increasing emphasis on a search for ways in which the ostensibly more fruitful ground of intergroup contact may achieve this objective. An important qualification in this field is made by Brown and Turner in their distinction between interpersonal and intergroup contact (Brown & Turner, 1981). The conflict in Northern Ireland is basically an intergroup conflict which relates directly to the question of loyalty and identity. This suggests that if reconciliation is to be achieved then contact should take place at an intergroup level and not just at interpersonal level. Merely by integrating schools or providing "mixed" holidays is not necessarily to guarantee that intergroup contact will follow. Actually McWhirter and Trew's evaluation of holiday schemes suggests that the stress is on interpersonal contact (McWhirter & Trew, 1983). Sadly, there are relatively few projects which actually challenge the obstacle of the sectarian divide and of entrenched

political beliefs. Thus intergroup projects where "contact" alone is regarded as insufficient (and the examination of issues has priority) are unfortunately, rare. As McCartney has shown, the bulk of the projects allow superficial contact only and do little to confront children with the realities of the conflict (McCartney, 1985). That is not to be overly negative in our criticisms of holiday scheme organisers, as in treading carefully on political questions they are simply conforming to a widespread norm in Northern Ireland that such issues are best avoided when dealing with "mixed company".

A critical obstacle to peace education in Northern Ireland is the reality that both parents and teachers are resistant to discussion about political questions. This is often referred to as the "denial syndrome" in which there is an effort to ignore the troubles by trying to preserve the schools as "havens of peace" (Cairns, 1987). However without a more open discussion about the conflict there seems to be little chance that genuine intergroup contact will ever be possible. That is not to overlook the extent to which topics relevant to political violence and political divisions already feature in the curriculum (especially in school history lessons). (Darby, 1974.) It is clearly difficult to make real progress in bringing Catholic and Protestant children together on a day to day basis but one should not rule out contact *per se*. A strong possibility would be one in which individual schools discussed such sensitive issues separately and then collaborated in structured meetings to further develop group work in this field. Thus any contact which occurred would take place on an intergroup not merely an interpersonal level. This may be the scenario of the best that one can reasonably hope for in the light of present realities. Even so, it is erroneous to exaggerate the extent of contact and cooperation across the sectarian divide (Dunn, 1984). The balance-sheet is not impressive. It still remains to be seen how far government support for the promotion of reconciliation in Northern Ireland will break down the barriers to intergroup contact. Now there is undoubtedly a government resolve to promote improvements on this matter. As early as 1982 the Department of Education for Northern Ireland issued a circular to schools stressing their obligation to formulate and:

> "sponsor policies for the improvement of community relations (so that) children do not grow up in ignorance, fear or even hatred of those from whom they are educationally segregated." (DENI, 1982.)

The practical support for these laudable objectives has come primarily from the Education for Mutual Understanding initiative which has been one of the most substantially funded educational ventures in many years. A list

of government documentation on EMU is given in the appendix. As for funding, a good deal of financial support has been provided for the "EMU-isation" of the curriculum and philosophy of schooling in the province. On the negative side, these developments have occurred at a time when schools are under enormous administrative and financial pressures following a range of government changes. These have required increased administrative responsibilities at every level in the schools as well as the obligations inherent in local budgetary management. Rarely in recent years have teachers and principals faced such a variety of new duties. The additional onus to make realistic headway with EMU is seen by many as the proverbial "last straw". In that context EMU is an interesting innovation but unfortunately, it may yet turn out to be a lost hope.

6 Conclusion: The Future of Peace Education in Northern Ireland – Problems and Possibilities

This paper has endeavoured to look at peace education in Northern Ireland from a broad perspective. This has involved not merely exploring the specific initiatives of peace education but locating them in the context of a segregated school system and in a social context that runs counter to any long-term change. In that environment there have been a variety of anti-sectarian initiatives in recent years which suggest the possibility of improvement. One of the more hopeful signs is the rise of the integrated schools movement which may yet develop to find a broader social class base than it currently holds. However, whatever the value and the merits of individual initiatives in peace education it is difficult to be optimistic about the long term possibilities of promoting change in this way, in Northern Ireland. If the present generation of young people are to be representative of the future then it is unlikely that much will change in this divided society. In the last analysis so much of the process of political socialisation (in Northern Ireland as elsewhere) occurs not in the schools but in the home so that young people acquire the politically entrenched opinions of their parents. However there is little hope of change at all unless there is the necessary climate for change. Therefore (and with great sensitivity and care) there is a need to encourage young people in Northern Ireland to question the traditional sectarian values of their homes. Naturally this constitutes a problematical role for the schools and is likely to be a long, slow process. However, despite these limitations the schools could well

prove to be the only long-term way of promoting change in a highly sectarian society.

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Appendix

List of Government Directives on EMU and Cross-Community Contact

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